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AN

ESSAY

ON THE

HUMAN CHARACTER

OF

JESUS CHRIST.

By WILLIAM AUSTIN.

BOSTON,
PRINTED FOR WILLIAM PELHAM.

1807.

DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, to wit:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Essay, I am sensible, is but a sketch. If it have merit, it will be attributed to the design, rather than to the execution. The subject is worthy the hand of a master, and is still open to much philosophical research. I have endeavored to explore a new, but indirect, source of argument in favor of the *Divinity of* JESUS CHRIST. For my support, I have relied on human nature, and strengthened my proofs by illustration and parallel,

so far as illustration and parallel could be applicable to the character. I thought it possible to render the subject amusing, as well as interesting, to piety. Let the public judge.

ESSAY.

EVERY age has produced its impostors, its enthusiasts, and its heroes. To rise preeminent over others is the first wish of the human heart. The predominant sensation, after man ceaſes to be wholly selfish, expands itself in comparison, which gradually awakens the ardor of ambition. This restless feeling is the governing principle of early life, and never entirely forſakes him, until he loses all confidence in himself. If the nature be generous, and events propitious, they produce a great man; otherwise, the disposition takes an eccentric turn.

It is not a singular circumstance in the annals of human nature, that every one of those heroes, enthusiasts, and impostors, the history of whose lives has been sufficiently interesting to merit preservation, has been actuated by his particular bias, and excited by motives, powerful in his own estimation, however weak or criminal in the opinion of mankind. One man, already a conqueror, thinks he must subject the world, before the world will acknowledge him a hero. Another, already a sovereign prince, and perfectly at ease, proposes more than mortal labours, in order to enjoy a quiet old age. A third, favored by the times, boldly associates himself with heaven, in order to govern the earth. A fourth,

more humble, though not less ardent, is willing, in a hair shirt, to travel to Jerusalem, preaching a crusade.

The characters of these men were so distinctly marked in their own days, their inſpiring motive was so apparent, that ſucceeding ages have been contented to appeal to them for illuſtration, or to raise commentaries on their lives. Doubtless, they all thought themselves paramount to the common sense of mankind, and little less than inspired, however romantic, or absurd their object of pursuit. Hence, the questions of magnanimity, or of selfishness ; of imposture, or of enthusiasm ; will forever arise, while the pursuits of men tend

to preeminence over their cotemporaries.

THERE is one character on record, who has commanded the attention of every succeeding age; and what is not a little remarkable, it is not yet settled, in what defcription of character this person ought to be claffed, notwithstanding he has engaged the zeal, the curiosity, or the resentment, of the divine, the philosopher, and the statesman. A person, whose singular fate it has been to be accredited by some, whose lives reflected no honour on the object of their adoration; and to be reviled by others, whose moral worth was never questioned. How then, are we to estimate a man whom many

worship as a God, whom some consider an enthusiast, and whom not a few revile as an impostor ?

If the characters of all eminent men have been drawn and judged from their lives and actions, why may we not, confining ourselves to the *Human Character* of Jesus Christ, reach the merits of the question, by testing his life and and actions by the general principles of human nature, or at least, by those principles which usually influence great men ?

In the reign of Augustus Cæsar, at a period, famous in the hiftory of that time for an universal peace, an infant, now universally known by the

name of JESUS CHRIST, was born at Bethlehem, a village of Gallilee, a Roman province. His parents, no doubt, moved in the humbleſt walks of ſociety, and during their whole lives, notwithſtanding the reputation of their ſon, remained in obſcurity. Their poverty and humility may readily be ſuppoſed; for the child was born in a manger, a circumſtance, which probably would not have been recorded, if family pride had been ſtudious to conceal it; unleſs, like the ſtory of Romulus and Remus, it was deſigned to be the groundwork of a romantic tale; or, as the child appeared to be promiſing, his humble origin might enhance his perſonal merit. But, as no ſuch uſes as theſe were ever made of his remarkable birth, it ſeems

reaſonable to conclude that this was a well known part of their family hiſtory.

The education of a boy, thus ſituated, is generally contracted, and ſubſervient to the narrow means of his parents. Hence, the adventures of his childhood are ſingularly barren of incident. Until the age of twelve years, it does not appear whether he was grave or gay, ardent or reſerved. There is not one brilliant obſervation of his ſedate, nor one effuſion of his more heedleſs moments, prophetic of his future character. The cauſe of this is open to two remarks, both plauſible, though offering different concluſions. It may be ſaid, he was juſt like other children, and diſcovered nothing worthy of par-

ticular notice. On the contrary, it may be replied, his more early diſcovery of himſelf might have derogated from the dignity and importance of his purpoſes. A *Boy-God* could not ſo eaſily have ſupported a great miſſion. But these remarks, neither of them, have much weight; for it ſeems he did exhibit himſelf to the world in abſolute childhood, and then commanded the attention of the public.

If the firſt wiſh of an obſcure, inconſequential, but aſpiring young man, ſhould lead him to aſſociate with the world, and to ſolicit public notice, it is nothing uncommon. Obſcurity, connected with ambition, uſually inſpires the boldeſt confidence. But it rarely

happens that a boy of real genius protrudes himſelf on the buſy world. In the firſt moments of conſcious, ſuperior worth, the boy of genius undergoes ſenſations wholly averſe to its public diſcovery. He trembles in the glare of obſervation, and retreating, flies from the preſence of thoſe, whoſe attention he is moſt anxious to arreſt. This is natural; the firſt openings of a great mind affect, and overcome the heart. A new and powerful ſenſation oppreſſes him; he is jealous of others, and dubious of himſelf.

At the age of twelve years, this boy found himself at Jerusalem. His parents had taken him with them to celebrate an annual feast. The city Je-

rusalem, to a child of common observation, muſt have been a ſource of much ſurpriſe. How many queſtions, and how many remarks would not ſuch a journey have raiſed in a young mind? His ſoul muſt neceſſarily have expanded in alluſion and compariſon. In the midſt of ſuch a ſcene as Jeruſalem preſented to youthful curioſity, every ſtep would have awakened reflection. Yet ſtrange, too young for an impoſtor, and too ſimple for a hypocrite, not a ſingle obſervation on human life, on the city, or on the inhabitants appears to have eſcaped him. Yet ſtranger ſtill, this ignorant boy, careleſs of all the novelties of the city, and truant to his parents, who had already left Jeruſalem on their journey home, without any introduc-

tion, alone, and probably in mean apparel, proceeds to the Temple, the moſt famous place in the city. There, he finds the moſt learned men in the country dictating on the public affairs. He ſeats himſelf in the midſt of them, and, all of a ſudden, he enters into the debate. By the ſingular pertinence and depth of his obſervations, rather than by any artifice of eloquence, he draws on himself the attention of all. Soon they become astonished, and dropping their own concerns, regard the child with a mixed tumult of curiosity, awe and wonder.

This early and brilliant success, in his first attempt to attract public admiration, one might imagine, would have

fixed the predominant character of the man. If the tremulous nerves of the Olympic victor would sometimes be overpowered in supporting the laurel which his corporeal strength had won, what must be the nature of him, who receives in youth, with equanimity, the more cherished, and flattering distinction, which a powerful mind commands from the willing, perhaps the unwilling voices of his cotemporaries? Already, in imagination, the brightest scenes open upon his manhood. The obscurity of his family is forgotten. The trappings of honour will not only clothe himself, but conceal the meanness of his parents. In the ardour of riper years, who will not follow him, whom they reverence in childhood?

We know nothing more of Jesus Christ, until he is thirty years of age. On this blank in his life, during a period of eighteen years, every man must judge, agreeably to his own feelings and views of human nature. But it must be obvious to every one that this long obscurity is, perhaps, the most extraordinary circumstance of his life. How could a young man, conscious of talents, and contemptible in that age, both on account of his parentage and place of nativity, sacrifice so long, the laudable pride of raising his family, or possessed of more expanded feelings, of honoring his native country? Though age is slow and calculating, youth is hasty and clamorous of the present. How could a youth, who at the age of

twelve, commanded the attention of sages, preserve a silence of so many years? Though prudence measures every thing with her compasses, genius is more rapid. How could a young man, like JESUS, whose nation was the reproach of the earth, bury himself in the obscurity of Nazareth for so long a period of that time, when the passions are all alive, and when pleasure engrosses the current moment, or ambition lays plans for the future?

AT about the age of thirty, JESUS appeared again in public. He was then in all the ripeness of manhood, at a period equally distant from the levity of youth, and the cares of age. He is reported to have been in his person ex-

ceedingly beautiful if you examined but one feature at a time ; but his entire countenance raised in the beholder an interest which immediately affected the heart. Sympathy, awe, reverence, but most reverence, was the prevailing sentiment he inspired. These were the features of his character in the moment of repose. His stature was rather above the common size, as was his person, but finely proportioned. His hair was auburn, gracefully flowing over his shoulders ; his steps slow, firm, bespeaking a man of purpose. The most brilliant temperature of health adorned his cheeks, which, in conjunction with his flowing beard, the fashion of those times, and a piercing, hazel yet unassuming eye, would have rendered him

altogether attracting, had not a high and gently retreating forehead of the most perfect symmetry, restrained familiarity and impressed the beholder with an emotion of respect. It was impossible to behold him, though he appeared under every disadvantage, almost suspicious, without being perplexed and dubious of the man.

Such is said to have been the personal appearance of Jesus Christ. But who will undertake to portray the cast of his mind, since every step of his public life ran counter to the common pursuits of common sense. Yet his public movements and public counsels offer sufficiently distinct outlines from which

to draw a character, not the less to be mistaken for its entire originality.

Jesus Christ, then, was endued not only with all those qualities of mind which are considered the attributes of command, and insure a superior standing among men, but he was still more noted for the milder virtues. These, though less splendid, merit more, in that they rarely associate with strongly marked characters, are subjects of attainment, rather than gifts of nature, and require a habit of circumspection to preserve, and a constant exercise to practise. But in Jesus the most opposite traits seemed to blend so naturally, that you are in danger of mistaking two virtues for a single one. His

habitual meekness, and undaunted firmness, his all subduing wisdom, accompanied with a subtle sagacity, and his almost childish simplicity, never for a moment proved a foil to each other.—Perhaps no man ever possessed a more ready versatility. Low life in which he was educated, was not more familiar to him than the more ceremonious company of the Scribes, the Pharisees and the Doctors of Law. His easy conformity bespoke on all occasions a knowledge of human nature which seemed to be immediate conception. No man ever approached him, without being improved, or at least, laid open to self inspection; while his calmness and presence of mind forever gave him the ascendant over the captious, whom he put down,

not in general, by the force of argument, but by a moral appeal to the heart, or by a happy illustration of the matter in question, or frequently by the self condemning method of Socrates. For it is worthy of remark, that whatever this man spoke was addressed to the heart, and nothing to the head. Hence, he was forever irresistible, while the simplicity of his appearance and his unassuming manners gave his wisdom a novel, and all-attracting charm. Unembarrassed with the doctrines of the day, destitute of the refinements of learning, contemning the niceties of logic, he made no claim to the praise of learning. Original in every thing, he seemed superior to all his predecessors in fertility of mind——'Twas doubt-

less ignorance, but neither the sciences of Greece or Rome were ever subjects of his appeal ; his own resources served him instead of the light of others, and if he was ever at a loss to explain himself, or illustrate his subject, the nearest object generally afforded the most lively conviction of his intuitive powers. The little child, who happened to be present, is as strong an example of the readiness with which he converted surrounding objects to his purposes, as the more ingenious, though artificial, parable. Possessed of such resources, where was the necessity of a display of learning, or to what profit could JESUS vary the embellishments of rhetoric, when a grain of mustard seed, to enforce his doctrine, was ready

to spring to a tree, in whose branches all the fowls of heaven might lodge? His was not the eloquence of the sophists. True eloquence must affect the heart; if the heart be not affected, however deeply engaged the head may be, it is no longer eloquence, it is argument. If JESUS CHRIST was not a finished orator by the rules of art, he was the first of orators by the force of nature. Suffice it for others to insinuate themselves, to watch the propitious turn of indifference, and gain in an hour, what they cannot command in a moment. Suffice it for others to beguile their hearers by the windings of the schools, by splendid figures, by apt illustrations, by strong allusions; the orator, however successfully he may use

these advantages, betrays only a barrenness of mind, compared with the powers of him who speaks only to the heart, and can at one effort convert his hearers to disciples.

No doubt, there was a peculiar and agreeable manner of address, accompanying the discourses of Jesus. It cannot be supposed but that the graces of his person, his ruddy complexion, still more spiritual in the moment of animation, his piercing eyes, mild or commanding, at pleasure, his fixed and ingenuous countenance, added much to his success. Yet there certainly was an unknown, secret charm attending this man, free from any affectation of applause. There was nothing popular, nothing winning,

in his manner, he never seemed to make an effort; how then was he always so ascendant over his followers, or rather, how did he collect so many followers? With the famous orators of that, and the preceding ages, graceful gestures, an animated eye, a frequent violence of action, passionate invocations and appeals, were the bye road to persuasion; with Jesus, *Expression*, rendered unnecessary any exertion of voice or of person. *Expression* in him was action, passion, manner, address, every thing. This was the mighty power, the unattainable power, which is said to have produced such strange effects, whether he rose upon the multitude in the terror of his wrath, or addressed them in the tone of charity and compassion;

whether he overwhelmed the assuming pharisee, or raised the humble publican. 'Twas this *Expression*, this inconceivable, naked *Expression*, 'twas this mysterious *Expression*, which so much perplexed his hearers as to the nature of the person.

Why then did not this man succeed in life? "He was not ambitious." But was not his public appearance a sufficient proof of his ambition? No man throws himself on the public, without ambition. Why then did not this man succeed in life? "He knew not how to embody the passions of men, and to point their direction." Yet this man, in a chance walk, in a first interview, could enlist two fishermen in his

service, and fix them during their lives in his interest. Why then did not this man succeed in life? "he knew not how to adapt himself to the age in which he lived." Yet no man ever possessed an equal facility of bending to times and circumstances, though in truth, no man, no, not Cato or Socrates, ever yielded less to the principles of his age. Besides, Cato and Socrates gained all their reputation and influence by resisting their age; and it might have been pardonable in Jesus, a man of obscure birth, to have sacrificed a little to popularity, especially as he did not associate himself to the stoics, or profess himself of any one of the prevailing systems of the day. The rigid Cato betrayed in some degree, his principles, by carrying

a servant with him, who pointed out the citizens by name, lest, in shaking hands, Cato might not seem to recognise his friends. Nothing of this sort is attributed to Socrates ; yet it ought to be considered that Socrates was a retired philosopher, Jesus Christ and Cato were public characters. Nor, in my opinion, is there so strong a resemblance between the Nazarene and Athenian as many have noticed. The one led a quiet, contemplative, theoretical life, and either from indolence, or contempt of foreign nations, closeted himself at Athens, and scarcely professed himself a public character, much less the reformer of his nation. The short career of Jesus was the reverse of this, and though it has perplexed many to find

a substantial motive of action, no one has denied him an uncommon ardour in his pursuits. So that, his want of success either supposes a great defect of character, or throws a veil of mystery over the man : For it cannot be concealed that a strange, and fatal inconsistency seemed to anticipate every step of Jesus. What a contrast between the mind and the actions of the man ! Never before was there united in the same person such a powerful mind, to all appearance completely counteracting itself. In vain do we search, we cannot find the slenderest tie of connection between the mind and the conduct, the passions and pursuits, of the man. Had he lived longer, he possibly might have unfolded himself. Yet, if can-

dour should temper suspicion over the grave of a dubious character, the motives of JESUS CHRIST ought not to be prejudged. That man must be a consummate hypocrite who lays down the the fairest system of virtue, on which to raise a monument of usurped power. That man must be superior to all his cotemporaries, who clothes himself in humility, in order to steal a robe of state. Who ever descended to the offices of a servant in the road to sovereignty ? Who ever underwent the public mockery of a crown of thorns, in pursuit of a royal diadem ? Few have seriously charged JESUS with such motives. Human nature is more consistent, and human motives are less refined.

However, let the motives of Jesus Christ be estimated as variously as the various views of mankind, still, his public life is not a less interesting subject of remark. We will draw a little nearer the man, and accompany him through life, 'tis but one year,* to his singular catastrophe.

We must now imagine to ourselves a man, an original character, who, conscious of his own extraordinary powers, had purposely reserved himself, until he could appear among men the most ascendant. As he was an obscure subject of a conquered nation, which had sunk into a Roman province, whatever were his views, he might esteem it most prudent to reserve him-

* Mann's Dissertation, and Priestly.

self until the moment of his mature character. Thus far, he conducted himself like a wary adventurer. But his succeeding movements were far from raising this suspicion. He, neither like an adventurer forced himself on opportunity, nor even calmly waited its approach. If it was the first concern of Jesus to win to himself a numerous party, the method that he took, though at first successful, discovered a total ignorance of human nature, and left a blemish which marks a half character: For it is a blemish in a great man to lend himself to half of the community, in despair of gaining the whole.

The first adventure of Jesus, though perfectly consistent with the

future tenor of his life, has no parallel. So extraordinary is it, that had it been related of any other person, it must have disappeared, long since, among a thousand other fleeting fictions, or at most have preserved itself in some repository like the Arabian Nights. Alone, friendless, and meanly clad, unassuming, and destitute of every means of inducement except that mysterious *expression*, JESUS meets two fishermen, brothers, busy with their nets. In all probability they had never seen him before, had never heard of him, and knew nothing of the man, or of his designs. Possibly they were young men in the rich enjoyment of domestic happiness; probably they were poor men, to whose daily industry a helpless, affec-

tionate family looked for daily support. Perhaps they were desperate in their circumstances, of careless life, of abandoned principles, and ready for any adventure. Yet JESUS made them no promises ; he awakened no passion ; he applied himself neither to their ambition, nor to their avarice ; no, nor to their love of pleasure, to such men the passion most present. He neither discovered his designs, nor tempted their curiosity. "Follow me," said he, "and I will make you fishers of men." In a moment, without hesitation, sooner than reason could dictate a resolution, all was deserted ; in a moment, this world, in their estimation, had dwindled to a point, a new scene opened to their imaginations, which though ap-

parently as unsubstantial as a moon-beam, turned the future current of their lives. Yet they fared hard, were generally despised as a new kind of vagabonds, and never forsook him, until, become dubious of heaven and earth, they saw the man arrested, and led like a felon to a death more ignominious than that of the gibbet. All this is no miracle; but to me it is a miracle. It is a miracle in human nature, and therefore less liable to suspicion, than a wrought miracle in the natural world.

Thus this extraordinary man, in a chance walk by the sea of Gallilee, beckoned to two fishermen, and in a moment, fixed them forever in his interest. With Mahomet, it was a labor

of three years, to gain fourteen proselytes ; and Mahomet possessed all those attributes of man which are capable of winning an enemy, or of commanding a friend. Before Mahomet spoke, says tradition, he was in possession of his audience. His presence charmed them, his gracious smile won them, his majestic aspect commanded them, his piercing eyes fixed them, while his countenance painted every sensation of his soul, and his gestures enforced every expression of his tongue. Yet Mahomet, faithless of his eloquence, and doubtful of his success, soon as he collected a few partizans, furnished himself with a sword, and proclaimed himself a captain. Jesus Christ, on the contrary, when most famous and success-

ful never expanded his views, but retained all his humility, and even condesended to wash the feet of his disciples. Mahomet, like CHRIST, promised heaven to his followers ; but Mahomet, brandishing, declared his sword was the key of heaven. JESUS CHRIST, on the contrary, opened the gates of heaven to the repentant : Here, he alarmed the conscience. With Mahomet, to conquer others was the crown of glory ; with JESUS, to conquer oneself. To the followers of the one this world offered every thing ; to the followers of the other, this world promised nothing, Mahomet opened a new world to the imagination, and added flame to a sensation of fire. What oriental could hesitate to follow the ban-

ners of Mahomet, when the houries of paradise, dancing among the palm trees, beckoned the fierce soldier to the delirium of eternal rapture? Jesus, with one hand laid on his heart, pointed upward with the other, and had no tie on his followers, but a sublime faith. Mahomet gained every thing; Jesus Christ suffered every thing; Mahomet lived a conqueror, and died gloriously, Jesus lived like a vagrant, and died like a felon. Mahomet established a new religion by bribing, Jesus Christ by taxing, the passions.

Passing on, Jesus saw two other fishermen, with their father, on shipboard. They were mending their nets. "Follow me," said Jesus, and

they left all and followed him. Soon, the little company swells to a multitude. From all quarters, people of many descriptions flock to his presence. His fame is already extended to distant regions, even to Syria. Does the man not perceive he is hastening his own destruction ? Is it not treason, under Tiberius, to be found in a Roman province, at the head of so many men ? What is his object ? Is it temporal power ? What weakness, to collect an army without one soldier ! Is honest fame, or the more imposing attractions of false greatness the object of his heart ? What folly, to collect around him the most ignorant, the most obscure, and the most abandoned !

At the head of this chequered multitude, few of whom knew the man, or knew the motives of each other ; at the head of this suspicious collection of idle, curious, wondering followers, Jesus, himself in appearance not less suspicious, ascended an eminence : and there seating himself, delivered to the crowd a moral lecture. Never, before, was the world illuminated with such a discourse. Never before, did such sublime precepts distil from the lips of a mortal. The heathen sages, from that day, lost all their credit. Their fine-spun casuistry sunk under the weight of a sublime moral, their patch work morality was trampled under foot and disgraced forever ; but all, all their good was melted in a mo-

ment into this half-hour, moral harangue. No wonder its force and novelty astonished the multitude. No wonder they stood looking to heaven in doubt, and were ready to follow him at hazard. How could they help reposing all their confidence in the man, whose unpremeditated discourse entered into every precinct of their hearts, and in humbling them, by discovering all that was base, at the same time elevated them above this world, by disclosing to them a sublime affinity? That man has surely found the governing principle of others, who after laying open to them their own hearts, can lead them at pleasure. We can only, at this day, imagine the expression of the man's countenance, the power of his

words all mankind have felt. The charm of his eloquence has departed, the beauty of his discourse is blemished through a halting translation, and the order is broken by chapter and verse, but the substance remains, and will forever remain, either an object of curiosity to taste, or of improvement to piety.

HUMAN nature was thought to be raised by the stoics, to a dignity, scarcely its own. But their moral austerity counteracted itself, and produced a pride and intolerance not always compatible with social life. The discourse of JESUS on the Mount, gave a moral, which though built on humility, transcended the severity of the stoics, and taught man what he ought to be, rath-

er than what he might be. The stoics made no allowance for human frailty. Even the milder virtues were treated with contempt. Pity was weakness, compassion a crime ; and love was divested not only of sentiment, but of heart. They tied up the passions, and chastised the sensations. Jesus Christ, though he struck at the root of man's pride, offered no violence to his nature. Jesus offered no new system ; he who addresses the human heart should never think of a system.

But why did not the civil authority arrest the progress of this man ? We have already told the cause. Jesus Christ never offered a system. Of all men he was apparently least solicitous

of reputation : for though he commanded, at pleasure, the passions of others, he never discovered a passion of his own. Beside, his public life was too unsociable for popularity, rather inspiring reverence, than courting favour ; though in a private circle he was willing to adapt himself, and sometimes lent his presence to domestic parties. A man of this description, of unassuming manners, whose constant doctrine seemed to impress on the multitude the duty of obedience, and even acquiescence under every form of government, could not be obnoxious to the Roman authority of that day. Patience, and resignation to others, is the doctrine most agreeable to a tyrant. Hence, the cause of the persecution of

this man must have been more deep and insidious than any alarm from the civil authority. But, was Jesus Christ an advocate for arbitrary power? Not Brutus was less so; with the feelings of prophecy, and with an unerring political foresight, he addressed himself, in general, to that great body of the community, who in all countries, and in all ages, can find little on which to repose, but a naked faith. Did he side with the rich against the poor? Not Aristides was more just. Did he inspirit the poor against the rich? Not Thurlow was more austere. The sagacity of Jesus led him to foresee, that under every form of government, the strong would prey upon the weak, that the rich would oppress the poor; that human society

was just like the pyramid, the bottom of which must forever support the whole weight, and that unless there was a sympathy on one part, and a moral feeling on the other, the community of men would become a system of aggression and countervail. No, Jesus Christ offered no new system. He only sublimated the religion of nature. Regardless of forms and ceremonies, he taught his disciples to look directly to heaven, in the midst of the single institution, the social board of bread and wine.

Nor was the civil power alarmed at this man's sudden renown. It was rather an admiration that followed, than a popularity that was courted.—

Jesus never remained in one place a sufficient length of time for a sedition, much less for a conspiracy to gain consistency. For, whenever the people assembled in multitudes, it was his constant practice to retire speedily to some other city or village: so that, a sedition, although most terrible in a despotic government, in that it is never without cause, was not feared from the public carriage of Jesus, by the Roman authority in Judea.

In this manner Jesus Christ travelled over the principal parts of his country, evidently devoted to some pursuit, the object of which, doubtless, in his own opinion, was superior to any of those attainments which usual-

ly excite the passions of men. For in the ardour of his purposes, JESUS overlooked all those objects, which were most dear to the great men of antiquity ;—and likewise money, the passion of the present day. With a mind at once solid and brilliant, which seemed to place its chief delight in conception of the sublimest moral truths, he left all his fame as a philosopher, to the treacherous ears of an ignorant multitude, or to the care of a few associates, who possibly could not write their names ! With a courage that never turned from an enemy, and with a firmness that encountered the whole opposition of the Pharisees, this man submitted to be spit on, to be buffetted, to be smitten, and to be scourged.

With pretensions to arrogate every thing, this man claimed nothing ; and only once complained that " the birds had nests, and the foxes holes, but that he had not where to lay his head." In the midst of a people who were ready to worship him as a God, he was content to be derided as an impostor. In the midst of a people whose favor was ready to outstrip the wings of his expectation ; Jesus sunk upon the public below Barabbas the robber. Yet what is no less extraordinary, he lived perfectly contented, neither envying the rich, nor despising the poor. Nor did he endeavor to ameliorate the severity of his condition ; or even to shun the ignominy of his fate, a pathetic presentiment of

which he expressed a short time before his death. Yet this man, always in the depths of poverty, was reputed to work miracles. But the greatest miracle of all is, he never wrought one in his own favor. In such a case would not any other man have exerted his power, sometimes, to have controuled his wants, or even to have insured his pleasures ? Would not an oriental have turned his water into wine ? Instead of a life of penance and penury, would not the congenial climate of Judea have inspired convivial gratifications ? Instead of suffering an eternal and conflicting chastity, would not an oriental, whose blood usually flows in a fiery current, or trembles in a voluptuous languor, have converted the very

cedars of Lebanon into a haram ? Yet this temperate Nazarene preferred the brook or the rivulet to the joys of the vintage. Yet this humble Nazarene travelled Judea on foot, and never rode but once ; and then in a manner that seemed to court the contempt of the populace. Yet this self-denying Nazarene frequented the tables of a Wapping and St. Giles. Yet this cold blooded Nazarene was as exemplary in his affections, as though he had been dipped, every morning, in the river Cydnus.

The fame of Jesus had now extended throughout Judea. Many of the genteel people, including not a few of the chief rulers, publicly whispered their doubts, " *If the man was not*

a supernatural being." This suddenly alarmed the Jewish hierarchy; and this was the ruin of JESUS. The disinterestedness of his morality, his simplicity of life, his quaker-like inoffensiveness, might forever have saved him from persecution, had he foregone that attribute which claimed the adoration of mortals, and which stamped him, at once, an impostor in the opinion of the Jewish authority. This unprecedented pretension, would alone, have rendered him dangerous to all those who dreaded a change: For when once a religion is *established* the presiding God is not permitted to interfere. But the eloquence of JESUS was frequently directed against the chief priests, the scribes, and the pharisees. Imprudent

man ! He might have known that every establishment, religious or civil, is cruel and unrelenting in the degree it is perverted. Yet Jesus pursued these hypocrites even into their sanctuaries, and overwhelmed them in their own temples. This an effort of enthusiasm ? No, their silence confirmed their conviction, and confessed the triumph of reason. If this man had seconded their views ; if this man had thrown off his sackcloth, and doubly fringed his garments ; if this man had associated with the chief priests, and the Jewish authority ; and why did he not, if he was an impostor ? If this man had only consented to have become what his countrymen were more than ready to have made him, doubtless his abilities

muſt have rendered him an illustrious adventurer.

The character of that age is well known. The Jewish hierarchy was paramount to thelaw of Moses. The ceremony of the tythe of mint, of annise, and of cummin was retained ; even the seat of Moses was respected ; but the spirit of the lawgiver had departed. The mantle of Elijah, long since worn threadbare, had been cast off for the fine linen of the East, an emblem of hierarchial purity. Imprudent man ! did he not know that under such a system, virtue is odious, and truth, treason ? Did he not know that, that man is worthy of death who dares attempt to bring back a corrupted age

to first principles? Surely if this man was an impostor, of all men he was most weak. He associated with the people, who were nothing, and neglected the hierarchy, who far more commanding than the hierarchy of the present day, was supposed to possess the fabulous key of the Catholics.

Now opens upon us a new trait in the character of Jesus. The meek, the humble, the modest son of Mary is no longer vagrant from village to village, he no longer retires to the mountains, or frequents the sea shores, but boldly proceeds to the temple, that very temple, in which at the age of twelve years he had astonished all who heard him. There, in the midst of a

thousand enemies, regardless of the reverence of the place, in the temple of the most High God, his only weapon, the law of Moses, he throws himself in the face of the whole hierarchy. The Scribes and Pharisees, heartless as their own principles, are confounded: For, such is the dauntless attitude of the man, and such the noble frankness of his carriage, such the heart appalling terrour of his rebuke, and such the overbearing vehemence of his reproach, that every passion of the hierarchy, except the secret alarm of office, sinks under his superior presence. Though these humbled, proud men were cloth-ed in authority; though an immediate apprehension was practicable; not a whisper from the lips of one of the

chief priests, not a motion from a single Scribe, not a murmur from one Pharisee. They wondered at the deformity of each other, but each retained his own features. They seemed for a moment to forget the painter, to contemplate the picture. The Scribe revolted at the moral aspect of the Pharisee, while the Pharisee turned his eye upon the chief priests, and the latter, in their turn, upon both of the others.

It was no doubt a novel scene, to behold a man, whose romantic life and mysterious pursuits readily raised a suspicion of enthusiasm or of imposture, boldly, in the character of a reformer, enter that temple, which the Jews, either from policy or superstition, con-

tended was the favourite earthly residence of the Uncreated. It was, no doubt, a novel scene to the hierarchy, to behold this man, not only usurp their office, but turn upon themselves with an unexpected violence and indignation. Doubtless, truth and conviction must have pointed every expression, or JESUS must have raised a correspondent violence and indignation; instead of which, the eyes of the whole hierarchy, fearful of the obscure Nazarene are turned on themselves. Had Moses himself appeared in the temple, treading on sunbeams, his head concealed in the dark cloud which once appeared on Sinai, and holding in his hands a scroll of the decalogue, they had not been more embarrassed, they had

not been more fixed statues. Never in Greece, or Rome, did any orator so readily triumph over his adversaries ; and never did any orator, no, not Cicero, nor Burke, venture to exhibit a public criminal in such repellant colours, as this carpenter's son presumed to portray the fairest reputed characters in Jerusalem. It was an overwhelming attack, not only on their system, but on themselves, unprepared with the least apology, and the charges were brought so completely home, that all reply was precluded.

This was one of those moral risks, which no less discover the man, than the more brilliant actions of the hero ; and perhaps this moral experiment on

the Jewish hierarchy was at once the most sublime and successful effort of indignant virtue which the world ever witnessed. Let us contemplate it for a moment.

It demanded an uncommon firmness, I had almost said, a madness of mind, to pronounce in the face of the nation the fiercest judgment on those, who still arrogated the seat of Moses, and whom ages had rendered sacred in the eyes of the people. There was in the public opinion, both in that, and in all preceding ages, such an intimate connexion between the emblem and the substance of religion, between the priest and the object of the national divinity, that a contempt of the god

was more readily pardoned than an impiety to his priests. This indeed was natural, as the priests governed the gods, not the gods the priests. Hence, no less a man than Alcibiades, who, at various periods of his life, was the most popular man at Athens, excited the public horror from a bare suspicion of his having wantonly broken some of the statues of Mercury, and at the conclusion of an entertainment, of his having acted, in mockery, the awful Elusinian mysteries: not to mention Anaxagoras, and after him Protagoras, famous philosophers, who were thought to merit banishment for want of faith, Socrates, reposing in his old age, on a life as venerable for its virtue, as were his locks for their whiteness, was hur-

ried before the tribunal of his country, and condemned to the hemlock for a supposed disrespect to the religious feelings of his countrymen. Yet Jesus, supported only by his own presence, regardless of common prudence, and more dauntless than either of those Greeks, always reserved his most unwelcome discourses for the ears of his enemies. Looking round on the hierarchy, who were watching an occasion of quarrel, Jesus colored with indignation, and while he saw the abuses of many ages lie light on their hearts, he did not wait for the tide of their malice to meet the gathering of his own rebuke, but he silenced them forever with a "woe unto you, scribes, pharisees, hypocrites!" Yet his wrath,

the wrath of a generous mind, subsided in a moment, and like a sovereign judge, who pitied, while he condemned, he moderated his fierce judgments in that most pathetic appeal, " Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not !"

It was sufficient glory for Demosthenes, in the midst of Athens, to deliver his philippics. Philip heard them not at Macedon ; and when the orator, in the character of an ambassadour waited on the king, the wretch was confounded in his presence. Cicero gained half his honors from Catiline, yet Cicero, in the midst of the Roman

senate, trembled in the face of his enemy. Burke had collected all the indignant epithets of the East and West, and safely, in a British parliament, he aimed them at the obnoxious Hastings.—Where shall we find a man, who unsupported, and apparently disinterested, has hazarded so much as JESUS CHRIST? Not Gilbert Wakefield.

IT is impossible for such a man as this to flourish long in a corrupted state of society. Passive, negative virtue is not only tolerated, but sometimes applauded, in the most degenerate condition of man; but when an administration of government lends itself to national depravity, and the civil authority, finding it can gain most, in the

worst times, a man of active, public virtue is more odious than any object whom *positive* law may reach. Such a man cannot be endured; the splendour of his virtues darkens all around him. The vital heat of his influence withers up the artificial growth of the holiday virtues of his cotemporaries in power. To a barren soil the early and latter rain is scarcely grateful; but the meridian sun is death to the heartless verdure. Those in power soon become sick of hearing Aristides called the just.——for the same reason the virtuous Gilbert Wakefield was sacrificed in the prime of life, and for the same reason, the much enduring Priestley hardly found respite on the frontiers of the wilderness.

Jesus Christ must have known that his feelings and principles were wholly averse to the manners of his age, and that he could not long be endured. Yet, how melancholy for a man in the bloom of manhood, before one of his hairs had become grey, before his mother had experienced the pleasure of a mother in partaking of the fame of her son, before his associates, whose strong faith laughed at the idea of his catastrophe, had witnessed the public homage, and consequent honors which they thought due to his character—how melancholy for a man, obscure like Jesus, and conscious of his claims on society, to die so young, like a malefactor, while his dearest relations must necessarily partake of the ignominy of

his fate; and how abhorrent to his own nature, to die so ignobly, while his heroic firmness was scarcely a counterbalance to the extreme sensibility of of his moral feelings? "Yet Socrates died with equal fortitude, and perhaps, with greater resignation?" O, how injurious! Socrates was seventy two years of age, had outlived his cotemporaries, was famous throughout Greece, and in the sanction of the Oracle, was the best man of his times. To a philosopher life has few charms after seventy. Of this opinion was Socrates, and it mingled itself with the reasons of his resignation. Among five hundred judges, Socrates was condemned by a majority of three.—He was still in possession of his fame

and virtue. Socrates lost nothing but his life, while JESUS suffered many deaths. Where were his friends in the trying moment? Where was Peter? Denying with an oath that he had ever seen the man! Where was the beloved John? The beloved John had fled. To whom could JESUS look for comfort? To his wretched mother, who saw him nailed to the cross, and watched his last struggles? To Socrates, life in a great measure was indifferent. To JESUS this was impossible; at the age of thirty-three, though the rosy fragrance of youth has departed, hope stills gladdens the heart; in perspective, the substance of life remains, although its glossy hue may be faded. So that, whether JESUS was possessed with the

spirit of enthusiasm, of imposture, or of pure virtue, life must have been exceedingly dear to him; for, whatever was his object, apparently, he left it altogether unaccomplished. He had neither reformed the age, conquered his enemies, nor advanced himself. Apparently, his life was less useful than that of Socrates; the violence of his virtue was too strong for the times. Socrates, on the contrary; was always persuasive, and this was necessary in the declining virtue of the Athenians. Jesus Christ was always imperative, and spoke like a God, rather than like a man. This, seemingly, was the height of imprudence; yet this was his manner from the beginning, and in this he persevered to the moment of

his death.—His last expressions were full of enthusiasm, of imposture, or of holy spirit.

The hierarchy soon discovered their own emptiness. The contempt, which the unprotected inconsequence of Jesus was ready to excite, gave a powerful effect to the earnest simplicity of his manner, and impressed his enemies with a sort of mysterious terror. They well knew that a reformer, whose manners were serious, whose morals were unexceptionable, whose firmness prepossessed the confidence of the indifferent, and whose ready eloquence seemed to take in ideas with his eyes, and impress them with his looks, would soon effect a change

of affairs. Hence, they naturally resolved on his death. It was ever the opinion of a majority that, an enemy, however virtuous, had better die, than that they should lose their influence. "The blood of one man, imputed to "many, would scarcely stain their "hands. In all human probability, the "miserable Nazarene would be for-"gotten in a short time, and his disap-"pointed associates, ashamed of his "fate, would be the first to revile the "impostor, or laugh at the enthusiast. "Let his partizans behold him dead, "let them witness his terrible catastro-"phe, and the delusion is over; no "mortal ever worshipped a dead GOD, "or erected a temple under a gibbet." Thou short-sighted scribe! Thou blind

pharisee! That dead man, in the opinion of a thousand generations, will revive again, a fragment of that infamous cross will be esteemed a sacred relict, and that temple in which his presence confounded you, shall, one day, be destroyed, and his presence shall be supposed to fill the temple of the Universe.

Consistent from the beginning, Jesus neither courted, nor shunned his enemies. In the moment of his arrest he discovered a magnanimity which has never been surpassed. They approached him cautiously, but Jesus suspecting their errand, first accosted them. "Whom seek ye?" "Jesus of Nazareth." "*I am the man.*" There is the sublime in nature, the sublime in

sentiment, the sublime in action, and the sublime in character. Of all these the sublime in character is most to be admired. Nothing from the mouth of any other man under similar circumstances has equalled this. The "*strike, but hear me*," of Themistocles has deservedly been celebrated; the expression of Socrates in a moment of anger has charmingly illustrated his presence of mind; the reply of the Indian Savage, "*We are enemies*," when asked his opinion of another, was perhaps an unconscious expression of sublimity; and the "*myself*" of Corneille is more elevated than either, but the whole merit of the latter is due to Corneille, it is nothing but a sublime conception of the poet, fitted on a great character.—

Whereas, "*I am the man*," embraces not only the sublime of character, but also the sublime of action.

"*I am the man*," said JESUS, and surrendered himself. No resistance, no evasion, no attempt to escape dishonored his past life. Regardless of himself, he was apprehensive for his friends only; and when they were dismissed, this eloquent man was dumb. The same presence of mind, and the same dignity which had accompanied him during his active life, accompanied him during the mockery of a judicial process. A short time since, he had silenced the astonished hierarchy. Now, he is arraigned a public criminal; his life and reputation are

at hazard. Perhaps he foresees his fate ; yet surely he will make one last effort to redeem his own memory from suspicion, and render justice to the motives of his followers. Surely, a man like Jesus, who had been so copious of promises; who had parcelled out to twelve poor men, twelve thrones in heaven; would not, in his last moments, desert those who had so honorably supported him, whose faith at all times was ready to surpass their senses. Surely, a man whose life had been devoted to partizans, whose sacrifices to him, were perhaps greater than his to them, (if a fishing boat in this world, is worth more, to most men, than a throne in heaven) ought not to have deserted his followers. It was mag-

nanimous in Socrates to wrap himself up in his past life; Socrates stood alone, no one had risked his fortunes, his reputation, or his common sense on the character or principles of Socrates. It was magnanimous in Scipio, when unjustly accused, to preserve a contemptuous silence. It was magnanimous and sufficient for Chatham, when, in parliament an insinuation was cast, that the public monies had been plundered, to raise his trembling, death white hand, and shake it in presence of the nation, signifying that no gold had stuck to his fingers. The case of Jesus was different; no private individual, before or since, ever possessed such an easy and unlimited controul over his fellow men. How then, must his fol-

lowers have been astonished, when they heard the dumb and passive account of his death! What less, than a public harangue; what less, than an exposition of his principles and views could his disciples expect? And what a field for his own feelings? The man might have brought his whole soul into the eyes of his enemies. An emanation of his own virtue might have passed over, and purified, for a moment, all his judges. His life was public, and would it have been derogatory to have appealed to his public life? Might he not have proclaimed his own innocence; or at least, have reasoned on the charges alledged against him? Yet this eloquent man was dumb; he preserved to the last his mysterious cha-

racter, and seemed to die his natural death. Nor does the mystery end here, his disciples neither complained of his conduct, nor sympathised in his fate. His own disciples still carried their faith beyond their senses, and adored the man in heaven, who, they confessed had died on a cross ! Him they had followed ; for him they had forsaken all : them he had apparently deserted, and left to the contempt of all men. Yet they followed this man beyond the grave, to place him on the throne of God ! Yes, those who knew him best, who had been for three years his bosom companions, when the man was dead, worshipped him as the only true God, persisted he was a divine being, and not only suffered martyrdom in the

cause of this reputed malefactor, but in the moment of their sufferings sometimes converted their enemies to their own faith!

HERE, an objection, indeed a powerful one, presents itself; and that freedom of remark, which pervades these pages, requires a serious notice. If the disciples of JESUS were, at first, credulous, and afterwards fanatic, their conduct after his death, was not only natural, but politic. After the crucifixion, the disciples were on the point of becoming the laughing-stock of all men. If, during the life of JESUS, they were not only contented, but gloried in the humility of disciples, how deeply must they have been disheartened,

after his strange and unexpected death! If their pride and self-love had not been greatly weakened under his discipline, their dubious feelings would with the help of a warm imagination redden to the fiercest fanaticism. Peter seems to have been the most violent of any of the disciples, and most capable of leading an adventure. Is it not possible then, is it not within the limits of probability, that some one of these zealous partizans, when they saw the God whom they had worshipped, dead and buried, should propose the bold design of establishing their novel system on its own ruins? "Let us tell the "world, and let us persist in it, that "Jesus Christ, the crucified God, "finished his career agreeably to an

" eternal dictate, that his death shall
" prove the salvation of all who will be-
" lieve in his divinity : and to inspire
" the world with new hopes of immor-
" tality, let us proclaim his resurrec-
" tion from the grave, and his ascen-
" sion to heaven, amidst a host of an-
" gels. This doctrine of faith, so agree-
" able to the laziness of mankind, and
" this doctrine of immortality, so flat-
" tering to their pride, will gain upon
" the world in proportion to our own
" apparent faith. The ignorant and
" abandoned we shall gain first : their
" sincerity will supply new zeal ; after-
" ward, the wise will follow from self-
" interest."

In like circumstances with the dis-

ciples, a proposal like this might have arrested the attention of honest men; for there is but a hair's-breadth between fanaticism and falsehood.

Objections like these, which are entirely circumstantial, are most satisfactorily answered, if indeed they are mere objections, by a recurrence to the circumstances from which they have arisen. It would be departing from the design of this essay to give any objection, a full discussion. However, I cannot forbear to observe that, the evangelists have candidly intimated the disappointment and doubts of the disciples at the death of Jesus, and in the simplicity of their narration either did not anticipate any objections, or

what is more probable, justly reflected that their own attempts to answer them would only render their record suspicious. So that, mankind are left to their choice of attributing to the evangelists great simplicity, or deep design. Now, there is certainly nothing on the face of either of the gospels, which discovers the spirit of intrigue, of enthusiasm, or of selfishness. Not Xenophon, of all writers the most artless, has more simplicity than St. John. Hence, if we cannot bring home to either of the evangelists the charge of enthusiasm, or of selfishness, the objection loses much of its weight, especially, when we consider that one of the disciples, who was afterwards a famous preacher, denied his association

with JESUS, another sold him, and a third, after the death of JESUS, proved inflexibly incredulous, until he was convinced by the most sensible demonstration of his resurrection. This looks very little like a conspiracy of fanatics. Fanaticism is all passion ; it is bound as with a chain to its object ; but the disciples, confessedly, were in a state of despondency for several days after the crucifixion. Judas, the treacherous Judas, was rather a calculator than a partizan ; and though it may justly be objected that, it is impossible to suppose that the trusty Judas could follow JESUS one year, listening to his high pretensions, and under a conviction of his divinity, betray him to his enemies. This, doubtless, seems

too absurd to credit. Yet so is the fact reported. Still, Judas himself will best answer this objection. "I have betrayed innocent blood," said he, and in the pangs of remorse, casting away the unholy profit, he executed martyrdom on himself, an act, which not less bore witness for JESUS than the death of Stephen. On the contrary, had the speculating Judas, at any moment, during his intimacy with JESUS, discovered his imposture, the crafty man would have raised his own reputation, and acquitted a public duty in surrendering to the state a dangerous impostor, while the credulous, disappointed disciples, ashamed of the disgraceful catastrophe of the wretch whom they had honored as

Lord and master, would have turned upon the corpse in silent indignation, rather than carry on the imposture at such an imminent hazard. Otherwise, defenceless as they were, they must necessarily have effected every thing by the force of their tongues. Destitute of the swords of Ali and Omar, and hopeless of the rewards of those conquering proselytes, the humble Galileans had to support two of the most difficult problems in nature, the divinity of a man who had been crucified, and his resurrection from the dead—All this, without any hope of reward, either in this world or the next, unless we are willing to suppose the barren glory of martyrdom in an unholy cause, or the dubious fame of giving

currency to a daring imposture could influence those poor, inconsequential men. To suppose this would surely be refining on human motives beyond common experience.

"*I am the man*," said JESUS, and surrendered himself. It is thought greatly to the honor of Socrates, that he disdained the proposal of his friends, who offered the means of escape. The proposition was derogatory, and the refusal claims no merit. Socrates was constant to himself; this is high praise; but Socrates could not conduct himself otherwise. There are certain situations in which great men are sometimes placed, that forbid them to descend from their characters. The sick lion suffers in silence,

and calmly parts with life; and the eagle, in his descent, turns his head toward the sun. It was impossible for Cato to live under Cæsar, or for Brutus to live under Anthony. In our own times, it was equally impossible for the virtuous Moreau to live under Buonaparte. The situation of Jesus Christ was different. His name, like that of Socrates, had not become familiar throughout the world. No oracle had espoused the reputation of Jesus. His fame had scarcely reached Rome, and that in a private letter. A young man, like this, might have fled from persecution, though capitally condemned, and have preserved his credit. To Socrates this was impossible; he could not have concealed himself among the Scythians;

and if he might, the fugitive philosopher must have forgotten that he was once Socrates. Whereas, JESUS, had he been guilty, his more mature years might honorably have retrieved his character ; and if he was innocent, it was his duty to preserve himself, if possible, to illuminate the moral world. Instead of which, he flung himself away ; in the prime of life, without an effort, he flung himself away, and with all his faculties wrought up to their highest tone, he died in a manner too unprecedented to bear a rational discussion, unless we consider him an unfortunate adventurer ; and then, the question which has raised this inquiry offers itself, " If JESUS CHRIST was an impostor, what were his mo-

tives? If he was an enthusiast, where were his passions? If he was a hero, where was his sword?"

THE life and death of JESUS have marked his character with too much precision to mistake him either for an enthusiast or a hero. The single question which will bear an examination is, "*Was he a God or an impostor?*"

THIS question then, on which the character of JESUS must forever rest, remains to be considered. I thought it more illustrative, and more logical to reserve this point for the conclusion, as the preceding notices on his life and conduct have naturally led to this inquiry, an inquiry which is exceeding-

ly difficult, and which allies itself to the feelings or interest of most men. Hence liberality in research may appear like levity, and the least bias will look like bigotry.

THIS inquiry might be extended to any length, embracing human nature in all its motives, windings, prepossessions and self-delusions. But the general reasoning may be confined to a narrow compass.

MANKIND have been detected so frequently in corrupt motives, and have so often suffered a dereliction from the avowed ties of moral necessity, that profession of virtue, to the busy part of the world, has become

more odious than open, abandoned principles ; as herein, the meanness of duplicity is spared, and the danger of deception more easily avoided. So that, the cloak of virtue has become the baize shirt of the sailor ; worn in winter, to keep out the cold ; in summer, to keep out the heat. This bias of mankind to suspicion is further strengthened from the disgraceful consideration, that every age, when time has illustrated character, and dimmed the glare of greatness, has erected a hundred gibbets for one statue. Hence it has become not only a speculative, but a common opinion, that, extraordinary pretensions ought to raise extraordinary suspicion ; and this belief is likewise strengthened from the fact,

that those who are most conversant in the busy world, have least faith in their fellow men ; so that, suspicion, warriness, and bird's eye-circumspection have long since become a branch of the minor morals, called prudence, caution, and self-defence.

Nor is this jealousy confined to any particular class of men ; the general mass of mankind, in the opinion of each other, requires the most watching. This jealousy soon becomes a sentiment, a habit of feeling, and in the degree the man's own head becomes grey, he thinks worse of his gray-headed neighbour. Hence, in the opinion of old men, the last generation is always the worst, and in their fearful appre-

hensions the end of the world is approaching; a sentiment that forcibly discovers their own depravity. Fortunately, mankind do not live to a hundred years, and more fortunately still, they lose their brightest faculties long before that period; otherwise, gray hairs and depravity would convey a like import. If youth is less suspicious, and less suspected, than age, it is but a short credit, which a little experience soon cancels.

UNDER a scrutiny so severe, doubtless, he must be a wonderful man, who, rising suddenly from private life, asserts himself a public reformer, and single-handed, tramples on a nation's prejudices. The character of JESUS, not only

in his own day, but since, has borne this test, the test of a public reformer, and a man of exemplary morals; while the charge of imposture or of hypocrisy has never been fairly brought home to him, although his pretensions were of the highest nature, and were considered by many, an impious arrogance.

IMPOSTURE has a cloak of many colors. The highest kind of imposture is political. It is then the offspring of a determined ambition, compelled for the present to smother its fires. When successful, it is connected with a sagacious mind, steady resolutions, and a deep knowledge of its own times. It is always full of intrigue, secresy and boldness, accompanied with

many of the best qualities of the head. It may be defined in its object, " corrupt views to a corrupt end." In its operations, slow and calculating, it feels its way, and becomes subservient to the times. Unlike hypocrisy which requires only a cloak, imposture, more active, is in pursuit of some great end; and in the degree it is successful it ceases to be imposture; and this by reason of the arduous task to which it is subjected; for no man prefers to accomplish by fraud what he can obtain any other way. Hence we find that impostors have universally the moment they were able, adopted force instead of fraud; and hence the proclamation of Mahomet, in the full tide of his success, " the sword is the key to heaven,

and the blood of the faithful will smell to heaven more odoriferous than frankincense." Unlike enthusiasm which carries its heart in its head, and presses blindly forward, political imposture has a tally for every step. The Macedonian and the Swede were enthusiasts. They were not in pursuit of enemies, but objects; otherwise the Scythian and the Turk would never have been attacked. Julius Cæsar was an impostor from the beginning, and calmly waited thirty years, until the sovereign power, fearful of a renewal of the days of Marius and Sylla, seemed to court his protection; and in our own age, the modern Attila would have been an impostor, had not the exertion of an opportune force on his

part, and the love of plunder on the part of the French people, exhibited him, at once, in his true character.

Religious imposture is more direct in its aim, and the enthusiasm with which it is always accompanied, gives it an easy currency, and sometimes, in the end, conceals from itself its own imposture. It is necessary that it should have a new system, or a new doctrine to support, otherwise, it soon loses its glow of enthusiasm, and then the charm dissolves.

To religious imposture an æra of ignorance and superstition is necessary. An enlightened age never sees an imposture of this description. But the

political impostor will adventure in any state of society, and is most successful in the degeneracy of a commonwealth. There is no instance of a successful religious imposture in a well organised society.

LITERARY imposture, likewise, delights in systems, paradoxes and new theories. The boldest truths are often thrown out in its extravagant pursuits. This species of imposture is seldom dangerous ; its object is only a sudden and novel fame. The last century was remarkable for a number of philosophic impostors.

IF JESUS CHRIST was an impostor, he was doubtless a political impostor ;

although his reserved demeanor and moral harangues discover an imposing, religious aspect. Yet that grandeur of character, those strong and calm traits, that habitual moderation and ready eloquence, that command over others in his most passive moments, and that officious readiness to sympathise with the unhappy, which is no mark of ambition or of enthusiasm, never yet distinguished a religious impostor. If tradition has given to Mahomet most of these great qualities, history has also given him the character of a soldier and a statesman. So that it would be derogatory to the abilities of this man to rank him in the class of sectaries. If he was an impostor, his mysterious carriage and public discourses were well

calculated to gain an ascendency over the populace, and this ascendency was but the nearest object in his expanded view.

Let us now examine if the conduct of Jesus can be fairly charged with imposture.

It must be granted that the life of Jesus Christ was clouded in singular mystery, and that the motives, both of his public and private movements, were, in general, inexplicable to his associates. How do we know that the long period of his obscurity was not consumed in the contemplations of future aggrandisement? How do we know that he was not studying the

character of his times, and cultivating his popular talents ? Mahomet, in retirement, formed himself into the future prophet of Arabia ; and the elder Brutus, with nobler views, under the imputation of idiotism was successfully planning the liberty of his country. There certainly was, both in that, and in the times preceding those in which Jesus flourished, every inducement for political adventurers. The public mind was ready to encourage the most daring pretensions. A long expected and powerful captain was to protect their declining fortunes in both of those particulars, so interesting to all men, politics and religion. In the ardour of expectation, the public was ready to add inspiration to the

enthusiasts, and the most active powers of GOD to the impostor. The national ambition was interested, and the public, when they please, can deify. In such times, a great man scarcely earns his greatness ; the public anticipate him. In all probability had another great man, a crafty, prudent man, like Sertorius declared himself in opposition to JESUS, Sertorius had preceded in public confidence the more unassuming Nazarene. Hence, in this respect, JESUS had much the advantage of Mahomet. It was the first concern of the Arabian to prepare the public mind ; whereas, JESUS, had his pretensions been even more suspicious could not have anticipated the wishes of his nation.

If the times were thus favorable to an impostor, and if the private life of Jesus is not without suspicion, his public conduct is not wholly free from surmise.

Why did he associate, from the beginning, with that class of people, who in a degenerate state of society, consider themselves outlaws from the community; with a people so fond of adventure, that it required only a beckoning to lead some of them in his train; and only a single harangue to fix them partizans? Why did he select those, who, though they left all, left nothing? He had an opportunity of winning one young man of great possessions, an ingenuous young man, naturally disposed

to virtue. Him he laid under what, at least in this age, may be called an impossible restriction; and the young man went away sorrowful. Nor ought it to seem extraordinary, if we judge that age by our own, that the rich, to whom JESUS shewed no courtesy, refused to mingle with a collection of people who seemed to hold in contempt that selfishness which the usual laws of property inculcate. The rich hate abstract equality. On the contrary, if JESUS was an impostor, he wisely discountenanced the rich and the great. These are generally timid, and can seldom be depended on in the moment of emergency. Whereas those, who followed JESUS, having once pledged themselves were retained from person-

al considerations; danger, far from dissipating, would embody them; fear would give courage, and instant ruin, intrepidity.

There are a few other circumstances attending the public life of Jesus, not wholly without example in the lives of other great men. His retirement to the mountains for forty days gave an unnecessary mystery to his character, already mysterious in the eyes of his own disciples. Yet it must be confessed that the comparatively enlightened age of Judea would have rendered this secresy impolitic in an impostor. Temporary retirement is a stale trick, worthy of a dark or superstitious age only. Numa Pom-

pillius, no doubt an excellent man, gained much of his consequence from the Egerian grove ; and the secluded character of Mahomet threw a ray of divinity over the impostor. Lycurgus too offers a resembling incident which is said to have happened to Jesus. The oracle pronounced Lycurgus "*Beloved of the gods, and rather a god than a man.*" A voice too proclaimed, "*This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.*" The sacred chickens of the Romans, and the holy dove afford but a partial resemblance ; and likewise the dove and the milk-white hind of Sertorius. The entry of Jesus into the temple, and the expulsion of the merchants, bear a strong likeness to the entry of Cromwell into the British parliament. These particulars are more striking in contrast with the general symplicity of the carriage and conduct of Jesus.

To all this, and much more which might be objected, I will only reply, that JESUS CHRIST, if he was an impostor, of all men was most weak, inefficient and wrong-headed. Of this his early catastrophe, and uniform eccentricity, are sufficient proof. On the contrary, if he was not an impostor, he may be considered successful in an eminent degree. Not Alexander, who in the intoxication of pride forgot his father Philip, allied himself so equally to the Great First Cause, as did the Nazarene in his sober senses, and in his most unpromising circumstances. Yet the one, though a conqueror, whose head, above the clouds, became giddy from its own height, and whose eyes, dazzled in the splendor of his own glory, saw not the devastation which the print of his feet left behind, was but a laughing stock in his pretensions to

his own creatures and bacchanals, while the other, ready to become the servant of all, at the same moment, challenged unlimited faith to his sublime affinity. Therefore, if JESUS was an impostor, he was doubtless unsuccessful; but if he was not an impostor, it is too much to say he did not attain his object; especially as himself indicated as much in his last expression, "*It is finished!*"

Yet who will say that JESUS CHRIST was either a weak man, or inefficient in his purposes? That he was wrong-headed, cannot be disputed with the money-schemers, the ambitious, and the calculators on time and chance. But, however shiftless JESUS may seem to the man of the world, and however weak and unsuccessful he may appear to the politician, the mysterious and instant

command that he exercised over his numerous followers, himself professedly the humblest of all, sufficiently marks the strength and power of his character. Nor was he by any means destitute of address and knowledge of the world. His conduct in several instances will best illustrate this strength of mind and ready judgment.

His decision on the question of the tribute money; and his rebuke to the hasty Peter, when he drew his sword on the servant of the high-priest, discover a quick and prudent judgment. But his question to the Jews, on the baptism of John, surpasses in sagacity any thing related of Socrates, in throwing his adversaries into a dilemma. His reply to those who questioned the propriety of plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath, is a mem-

orable instance of temperate reproach. The young man too, who went away sorrowful, was the best possible illustration of his own doctrine of grace.

With such faculties, all-essential to an impostor, and such as might have commanded success in any of the usual pursuits of ambition, Jesus, although a public man, preserved his original poverty, sought no offices, solicited no friends, deprecated no enemies, and still claimed a share of the God-head; and although he persevered in this celestial claim, he carried himself with so much meekness and humility, that his public conduct was marked by no human motive; for so little selfishness did the tenor of his life discover, that his predominant passion was a secret to his own disciples: So that, if Jesus Christ was an impostor,

we may boldly pronounce that the secret of his imposture was buried with him in his grave.

If such had been the extraordinary life of any other person, his death would properly conclude the subject; but the life of this man, however uncommon, bears no parallel with his wonderful destiny, a destiny, which had it been distinctly foretold in his own life-time, would have required, perhaps, as much faith to have believed it *then*, as it *now* requires to believe the record of the evangelists. Could the faith of man, when the dead body of this crucified person was exposed to the populace, be more severely tried, than in listening to the story of his future destiny? It is by no means incredible that a Jew, who had declared himself the son of God, yet being incompetent to support his

sublime pretensions, should lose his character, and sink below the ordinary reputation of malefactors. But it must, at that period, have seemed incredible to all men, that this person, whose fate was so contemptible that it did not excite the common sympathy of humanity, should soar from a gibbet, to the throne of God, should enjoy a coequality with the creator of the universe, and in the opinion of successive generations, should partake of divine honors both on earth and in heaven. Wonderful destiny! That a man, who when among his fellows, had no home, and who when dead, was beholden to the kind offices of a stranger for his interment, should, in leaving his miserable garments, his coat without a seam, to be divided among his executioners, ascend within three days to heaven, amidst a host of angels, to be welcomed to the

throne of the most High God! Wonderful destiny, that such a man, once the contempt of the world, and apparently deserted both by heaven and earth, should become the vehicle of all the hopes of the children of Adam; and through every succeeding age, whether dark or enlightened, whether superstitious or philosophical, should enjoy as well in the palaces of kings, as in the cottages of the poor, the real or pretended worship of whole nations!

Such is the destiny of Jesus Christ, a man, above all others, mysterious in his life, singular in the circumstances of his death, and wonderful, after his death, from the influence of his character on the most enlightened parts of the world.

FINIS.

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